

Patrick Iber. *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015. 336 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-28604-7.



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Patrick Iber's *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* is a study of the transnational political Left in Latin America. Suitably titled with a quote by Leon Trotsky, who in many ways epitomized the struggle within the political Left in Mexico, it relates how the project of a social democracy failed.

In the past two decades, scholars have called for new ways to write the history of a Latin American Cold War that would allow for Latin American agency and voices.[1] As a result, historians have highlighted the local roots of the conflict; illuminated the inter-American dimension; and examined how Latin Americans colluded, shaped, and resisted the Cold War.[2] However, by and large, scholarship still emphasizes a Cold War paradigm that places US-Latin American relations in the context of anti-communist struggle and US security policies, focusing the attention of Left and Right alike on military interventions, economic influence, and diplomatic relations to the detriment of cultural aspects of international relations.[3] This makes Patrick Iber's book on the cultural dimension of the Cold War within Latin America a very welcome contribution.

Highlighting the role of intellectuals as "privileged communicators" between the masses and the state (p. 1),

Iber directs his focus not at the authoritarian Right but at the fragmented political Left in Latin America, more specifically Mexico, and its struggle regarding "how to bring about a humane socialism that would balance social justice and individual freedom" (p. 3). As Iber recounts, this was far from a united and solidary Left, but a fragmented one, and the major fault lines ran between the advocates of social democracy and proponents of socialism or communism. He advances this argument by studying the three major players in the Cultural Cold War—the Soviet Union, the United States, and Cuba—through their front organizations: the Soviet-sponsored World Peace Council (WPC); the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) financed through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA); and the Cuban Casa de las Américas, as each tried to mobilize and instrumentalize culture as a vehicle for its Cold War message and vision of social progress.

Iber convincingly relates how the cultural Cold War was rooted in the pre-Cold War history of the region, starting in the 1930s and 1940s, when exiles from the Spanish Civil War and communist dissidents such as Trotsky himself migrated to Mexico. These exiles carried with them the political divisions and animosities of their home societies. This "international civil war among left-wing intellectuals" acquired a new dynamic with the

East-West confrontation after World War II (p. 47).

In chapter 2, Iber focuses on the WPC. Sponsored, supported, and guided by the Soviet Union, the WPC attempted to draft artists into a cultural Cold War through the promotion of “peace.” By the late 1950s, however, its never extensive influence had waned and was replaced by the Casa de las Américas as the defining cultural institution of the radical Left. Chapter 3 deals with the CCF. Backed by the United States and financed by the CIA, the CCF’s official aim was to promote social democracy and to denounce the totalitarian visions of the USSR and later Cuba. In one of the most fascinating accounts of the book, Iber narrates how the CCF nurtured the political Left in Cuba throughout the 1950s, and thus unwittingly enabled the revolution to succeed. In the end, the unmasking of the CCF as CIA-backed in the late 1960s spelled out the end of the reformist project.

The turning point that transformed the political Left was, without doubt, the Cuban Revolution of 1959, a home-grown socialist model that soon replaced the Soviet Union as the reference point in Latin America. Likewise, the Cuban Casa de las Américas became the central institution to spread this socialist vision, a story explored by Iber in chapter 4. However, despite inspiring a generation of the political Left in Latin America, the Cuban Revolution also exacerbated the already existing rift within the Left. Many of the earlier supporters of Fidel Castro were forced into exile or severely punished, and soon the regime drew criticism for its authoritarian streak and political as well as cultural censorship.

Ultimately, as Iber relates, by the 1970s all three utopias had failed and with them the belief that intellectuals and artists could and should play a fundamental role in mediating these social visions. Rather, and this would be a fascinating theme for another book, we see the rise of social scientists and technocrats from the beginning of the 1960s. These utopias failed on many fronts, but particularly because of the inherent contradictions in their political programs. In the case of the CCF, preaching liberalism but stifling dissent showcased the very limited notion of freedom the organization promoted. More important, as political events such as the 1964 military coup in Brazil and the blatantly illegal US intervention in the Dominican Republic of 1965 showed, building a social democratic Left with a benevolent and friendly United States was nigh impossible.

Likewise, by the late 1960s, with Ernesto Guevara dead and his *foco* theory proven wrong, as well as the Cuban endorsement of the 1968 Soviet invasion in

Czechoslovakia, the Cuban model lost much of its appeal. In the case of the Casa de las Américas, proclaiming freedom but only within a very restrictive definition of the revolution along the lines of the famous dictum “within the revolution everything; against the revolution, nothing” led to disenchantment among the Left. Ultimately, these visions failed because every organization failed to practice what it preached.

Intriguingly, despite the close ideological and financial links with their backers, Iber shows how these front organizations were not simple instruments of hegemony, but hybrid organizations that allowed artists and activists to shape debates and “localize” the Cold War. Moving through different case studies, Iber demonstrates that distinct cultural and historic contexts mattered, just as much as the people who were involved. With his nuanced analysis, he denounces the view that the United States, and in consequence the CIA, was omnipotent or omnipresent. While the United States and the USSR financed and set the agenda for the cultural front organizations, local branches acquired their own dynamics and controlling staff or artists proved difficult to manage. In the end, the actions of the front organizations often had unintended consequences as the Cuban case aptly highlights. Iber narrates one such example in chapter 6, showing how the CCF successfully “modernized” and incorporated a number of Latin American voices in the Mexican case, while in the 1960s, such attempts yielded few results in Brazil and Argentina. Ultimately, modernization never fully materialized because CIA involvement in the CCF was uncovered in 1966-67.

Iber’s *Neither Peace nor Freedom* is a thought-provoking book and deserves much praise, so I have only minor quibbles to add. While the trope of Mexican exceptionalism is not helpful, one wonders if what Iber relates is truly a Latin American cultural war or, in essence, actually a Mexican one. While he offers excursions to Brazil, Argentina, and more extensively to Cuba, Mexico remains the pivotal center. Of course there are limits to the archival work historians can aspire to, but I was left wondering, as a non-Mexicanist, if the Mexican case was indicative for the whole region or rather a special case. My own impression is that the Cold War in South America acquired a very distinct trajectory. In sum, it raises the questions how to contextualize Mexican history in broader Latin American history.

This is a carefully crafted and elegantly written book that charts the ebb and flow of the cultural Cold War and simultaneously highlights the local Latin American di-

mension. The book is meticulously researched, and—no mean feat—an enjoyable read.

Notes

[1]. Gilbert Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds, *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Greg Grandin, "Off the Beach: The United States, Latin America, and the Cold War," in *A Companion to Post-45 America*, ed. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002); and Max Friedman, "Retiring the Puppets, Letting Latin America Back In: Recent Scholarship on United States-Latin American Relations," *Diplomatic History* 7, no. 5 (November 2003): 621-636.

[2]. For a good overview on recent scholarship, see Andrew J. Kirkendall, "Cold War Latin America: The

State of the Field," H-Diplo Essay 119, November 14, 2014. See also Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Piero Gleijeses, *Conflict-ing Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); and Ariel Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America, 1977-1984* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Centre of International Studies, 1997).

[3]. Gilbert Joseph, "Toward a New Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations," in *Close Encounters with Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Catherine LeGrand (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 3.

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